



Aussie Co-operatives Pioneering Education Program

Two of Australia's largest co-operatives are pioneering a co-operative identity education program in partnership with the Co-operative Federation of Victoria Ltd and the Co-operative College in the UK in August and September 2006.

The two co-operatives are the Murray Goulburn Co-operative Co Limited and Capricorn Society Limited.

Murray Goulburn Co-operative Co Limited was established in 1950, it has approximately 3000 suppliers and 2300 employees, a A\$2 billion turnover and is Australia's largest manufacturer of dairy products.

Capricorn Society Limited is the largest independent automotive parts buying co-operative in the southern hemisphere. It acts as an intermediary by facilitating strategic partnerships between its members and suppliers. Members are typically proprietors of mechanical workshops, service stations and smash repairers.

The co-operative identity program taps into the experience of UK co-ops which in the last decade have turned around their declining fortunes. UK co-ops are growing their market share and community presence through an awareness of their difference and advantages that come through co-operative identity training.

The Co-operative Federation of Victoria Ltd was established in 1970. It is the peak body for co-operatives in Victoria. In recent years it has established the australia.coop web site – a web portal for Australian co-operation and co-operatives. The web site has over 200,000 visitors per year.

The Chairman of the Co-operative Federation of Victoria Ltd, Mr. Tony O'Shea, said: "Capricorn in WA and Murray Goulburn in Victoria are committed to the development and implementation of effective co-operative education strategies."

"Both co-operatives recognise the need to be able to communicate their co-operative difference to members, suppliers and employees. Both societies are already undertaking many positive activities that derive from their co-operative status, but they now want to aggregate these together into a clearer co-operative education strategy."

"There has been a significant co-operative education gap in Australia – a scarcity of trainers that could help co-operatives understand more deeply the co-operative model, and how the application of its values could help them in the market place."

"In the absence of an established co-operative education system in Australia, societies committed to good governance have instead used private sector director training programmes. In the agricultural sector, the Agri Bis Conference organised by Monash University provides some input, and a number of the state co-operative associations/federations run annual conferences with some educational input."

Mr. O'Shea said that "with the Co-operative College we are bridging this gap – a co-operative education program that integrates the co-operative identity into the business goals, strategies and operations of co-operatives."

"In pioneering a co-operative identity workshop in Australia, Capricorn and Murray Goulburn are laying the foundations for an ongoing co-operative education program that can benefit all co-operatives in Australia."

Trent Bartlett, Chief Executive Officer of Capricorn Society commented that "arguably, given the demands of regulators and higher expectations of corporate governance, co-operatives are not so unique that we are able to operate outside generally accepted commercial disciplines."

"Co-operative Director and Executive Education programs with esteemed organisations such as the Co-operative College from the UK, hold the key to helping co-operatives to understand and leverage the co-operative difference and to also re-affirm Capricorn's commitment to the international co-operative principles"

"Appreciation of the value of co-operatives has declined in recent years with the loss of some of our larger agricultural co-operatives. We look forward to the assistance of the Co-op College in further developing Murray Goulburn's ability to capitalize on its co-operative strength," commented Murray Goulburn Chairman Ian MacAulay.

Mervyn Wilson, Chief Executive of the Co-operative College in the UK commented: "We are delighted to work with CFV and Capricorn and Murray Goulburn on a Co-operative Identity program to build their understanding of what it means to be a successful co-operative business in the 21st century. The College's work with organizations across the globe has given it a unique insight into the issues facing co-operatives and they seek to compete with other forms of business and continue to bring the benefits of co-operation to their members, employees and communities in an ever more competitive global market.

Mervyn added "Co-operatives are a vital part of a modern market economy, as demonstrated by their global success. Collaboration with CFV to help build their capacity to deliver co-operative education programmes in the future provides a practical example of putting our values and principles into practice and demonstrates how co-operation between co-operatives can work for the benefit of all concerned"

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